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## PROPOSED CHANGES IN THE ACCREDITING OF HIGH SCHOOLS

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There are valid objections to every conceivable method of admission to college. The oldest method of which we need to take any notice is that of examination of every prospective student at or near the time of entrance. This method, however, resulted in a cramming process rather than an educational process. Students commonly gave only the tithe demanded by the law; mental assimilation was not called for. The secondary school shaped its work to a highly specialized end—that of passing a more or less stereotyped set of entrance-examination questions. It was the era of conning of question-books composed of examination questions that had been used in Harvard, Yale, and other institutions of the East. The intellectual and spiritual growth of the pupil suffered arrested development from which it might or might not recover in the period of four years in college. When the human mind once begins to grow by accretion instead of assimilation it takes a set that is likely to remain through life. The pedant and the man afflicted with that peculiar mental squint called “total recall” were the legitimate outcome. Examination for entrance to college means dry rot in the secondary school. The examination board removes some administrative difficulties but it has not, in the nature of the case, reached the root of the difficulty. We still have the examination with its attendant evils.

The certificate plan has been used in the East and is still used in large measure by many of the better institutions. Reports conflict as to the efficiency of this plan but as the board now charged with the administration of the certificate plan pursues a very conservative course in accrediting such schools only as have proved their efficiency, and since the list is revised yearly and any school whose pupils do not reach a high standard is thrown off the list, it follows that principals will use the greatest care in

recommending only students of more than ordinary ability. While the certificate plan may be efficient in the sense of bringing into the schools a limited number of high-grade students it, nevertheless, has a tendency to shut out the average student from college privileges.

This, by the way, is one of the greatest difficulties today in our higher educational institutions. The schools seem to want only the intellectual cream of the country. This tendency is away from the democracy of intellect, and it is unfortunate, for the reason that at present our schools pay a premium on power to absorb and give out again the instruction received. The student who is slow in maturing or who is so original in his bent of mind that he finds it difficult to conform to the order of things that he finds around him in the schoolroom, has an uphill road to travel in getting through the secondary school, and especially in getting into college. The aristocracy of intellect is the bane of many a higher institution of learning. This would not be so bad if the precocious student always proved to be the best in the end and the most helpful to his fellow-men, but it often happens that he falls by the wayside in later life while the student who did not make his mark in college becomes the benefactor of his race. Those of us who have read Swift's *Mind in the Making* will recall his chapter bearing upon the unpromising character of the youth of many men who are now world-famous.

The diploma plan of admission to the university originated, I believe, in the University of Michigan. It has come to be the chief method of admission to all the state universities in the group of north-central states. In the early years of Michigan's history, laws were passed making the state university the head of the educational system, not merely the highest school in the system; it was to exercise supervisory authority over high schools and over other colleges that should later be established. This gave authority, and in fact, made necessary the then liberal plan of accrediting certain schools so that graduates might enter the university on diploma.

No other state in this group, so far as I am aware, had such a provision in its early legal enactments. In Wisconsin, for

example, provision was made for the supervision of high schools by the state department of education, and not by the university. The state superintendent was required to approve all free high-school courses, to inspect high schools, and to withhold high-school aid from such schools as did not reach a reasonable standard. The only authority given the university was bestowed upon the Board of Regents which was authorized to determine entrance qualifications.

Following the lead of Michigan, Wisconsin and various other states of the Union have developed a system of inspecting and accrediting high schools. Many difficulties grew out of this relationship between the high schools and the universities. Numerous efforts have been made to solve these difficulties without giving up the general plan.

For instance, when it was discovered that there was a strong call for courses of instruction that did not, according to the traditional idea, lead to college, the universities suggested that the schools might offer courses that did not lead to college but which were designed more immediately to prepare for life and for service in the community.

This solves the difficulty in part only, for it involves an early determination on the part of the student whether he will go to college at the end of his high-school course or give up his school education at that point. This is indeed a serious difficulty. No pupil is fully prepared to say, at the beginning of his high-school course, whether he will be able to enter college or not, or whether he will desire to go further with his education. It is evident that the broader the road leading to the college door, the better for the boys and girls of the nation—hence the better for the nation. The question of entering college or not entering college should not be settled definitely, at least not definitely in the negative, until the opening of the college year following high-school graduation. No, it should not even then be settled in the negative, for many a man goes to college after a decade or more of work following his graduation from the secondary school.

Another attempted solution on the part of the university authorities was to say that what was best in the way of preparation

for college entrance was also best as a preparation for life. This is a broad and sweeping generalization which no doubt has given great comfort to college authorities; but who is prepared to say that four years of Latin is a better preparation for life than four years of well-planned, well-articulated work in industrial training? The fact is, this generalization is entirely too broad and sweeping and too little based upon actual investigations and facts to be worth anything as an educational doctrine. The fact is few, if any, of us believe there is any truth in it. There is a tendency today, and with a great deal more practical sense, it seems to me, to turn the maxim around and say that which is best for life is best as a preparation for college. I would rather undertake to maintain this proposition than the one so long maintained by college presidents.

Another method of solution has been gradually to liberalize the work of the high school by admitting subject after subject for college credit and by reducing the friction in the high school in analogous ways. This tendency has had beneficial effects, it is true, for the simple reason that it approaches more and more nearly to the condition that ought to exist as between college and high school.

Another method that has been used in a few states is the establishment of a board composed of the president of the university, the state superintendent, and certain others for the purpose of determining what the high schools shall teach and how they shall teach it. The state of Minnesota has perhaps had the most successful experience of any state with a board of this kind, but I am informed that it amounts to very little more than a device after all for the university to exercise its real authority over the schools through its president, without creating so much friction as utter lack of representation on the part of the high schools would involve. I am told by competent observers in Minnesota that the university really dominates the situation in that state, whatever appearances may be.

In Wisconsin we have a double-headed system of inspection and some other states are now moving in the direction of such a system. This tendency is unfortunate. The state inspects and the

university inspects, but when the two occupy the field jointly, the university inspection is in the position of paralleling, duplicating, and conflicting with the work of the state, or vice versa if it better suits the hearer to put it in that form.

This is not a final solution to this vexed question. I have had many letters from high-school inspectors, from high-school principals and others, most of which show confusion of thought upon this point. Some think the state can inspect in one way while the university inspects in another; that one may inspect for one purpose and the other for another purpose, but this is only temporizing the situation. In order that we may have unity, efficiency, and economy in the inspection of high schools the inspection should be centralized.

The evil effects of the system of accredited high schools are numerous and serious. The college or university is today yielding slowly and perforce to the pressure of modern life without its walls. The old ideal and the ideal still in vogue, in the college of letters and science in particular, is that of leisure to follow intellectual interests to the end that scholarship may result. To make a college course useful in the way of preparing for efficient citizenship except in the broadest and most general way, is not the ideal of the college or university today. This tendency and ideal, the higher institution of learning forces down into the secondary school. Such an arrangement forces all to take college-preparatory courses or forego college, as has already been stated. It brings utility courses into disrepute and disarranges the natural valuation that would otherwise be placed upon the various studies of the high school. Furthermore, the university tends to crowd too much into the course. The requirements, for instance, in the four-year Latin course are much beyond what the ordinary student can accomplish satisfactorily. Thus, while the university stands for scholarship it, in the direction of Latin and many other subjects, blocks the road leading to the ideal of thoroughness. This domination by the university has existed so long and the high schools have become so accustomed to it that they generally seem as little aware of it as we are of the air we breathe. It has become the natural way of living. The work

imposed upon the high schools by the university is also, in many cases, too technical for the needs and interests of boys and girls in our secondary schools. This is notably the case in physics but it is not confined to this subject.

The accrediting system places the control of the high school outside of the high school and in another authority which tends strongly to *use* the school to its own ends. This tends to make a technical school of the high school. It often does not have the merit of being technical in a broad sense. It becomes more of the nature of a trade-school. The high school apes the college in many ways and does not develop into a strong, independent, self-reliant institution with its own ideals and standards. The high school looks to the college to learn its duty to its constituency instead of studying the situation at first hand.

What is the remedy? At the outset I reminded you that no method is free from objection, but the plan to have the high school free from all domination except what the state sees fit to exert through legislation and through its department of education is the one that commends itself to me as far preferable to any other. This is particularly true of all state universities. There is not the shadow of an excuse for the domination of high schools by the university in any state in which the high schools have been brought up to a fair standard of excellence and in which the state has come to realize the necessity of making a school-system out of the schools of the state.

The state university is often spoken of as the head of the school-system. Whether it is or not depends upon the meaning of the term. If it is used in the sense of the highest school in the system, then it is true, but not in any other sense. The state university should rest squarely upon the preparation given by the school next lower in the system. The head should not separate itself arbitrarily from the body.

When colleges were small and had a limited faculty and taught only a few branches, it was necessary for the proper articulation of the secondary school with the college to have pretty definite instruction as preparation for passing from one

school to the other; but at the present time our great state institutions have beginning classes in almost every subject ordinarily pursued in the high school.

It makes no material difference to the university whether the student has pursued physics or not; whether he has pursued German or not; whether he has pursued biology or not. The only thing the university by right is concerned about, is the thoroughness with which the work that is attempted is accomplished and the habits and maturity of mind acquired.

I would then have the states of this group develop state departments with an adequate force of inspection entirely independent of the university, stimulating and encouraging high schools, and bring about such development in them as modern needs and requirements dictate. I do not believe that the state department should dominate the high schools in the sense of standardizing the course of study and determining from outside just what the high school shall do and what it shall not do. The only graduates of four-year high schools that should not be recommended for college are those who have not shown intellectual interests or who have pursued what may properly be termed trade-school courses.

Such a change as I suggest would in no wise lower university standards, in fact, I think the greater thoroughness in the teaching of the branches that are attempted, which would likely result, would bring about a far better standard of work in the university itself.

The college through official, or quasi-official, inspection is now making it impossible for the high schools to do work that satisfies them, or the public, or the college. Many students who ought to go to high school do not go, and many who start do not finish because the courses are not adapted to boy nature unless the boy happens to be a bookworm.

What we ask for is that the university shall release its grip and allow the secondary schools to develop. They ought to be permitted to develop freely from within and not be forced into the Chinese shoe of college-entrance requirements. When this is done both institutions will profit by the change.